

## OUR BONNIE.

A ROMANCE BY HERBERT OAKBURNE.

### CHAPTER I.

SIMPLY INTRODUCES THE READER.

WHERE will you find a work of fiction that has not some touch of sentiment in it? My story, dear reader, does not in the least differ from others in this respect; but, whilst I warn you of this fact, I would impress upon your mind that there is sentiment *and* sentiment, and that whether good or bad, it has a place in the history of human individuals, and must therefore bear recording in a sketch of life.

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It was a funny little letter and had faded with age. She was reading it to him as they sat in the boat, and he was resting the oars to listen. Now and then a playful smile passed across his brow as he caught the meaning of each sentence.

*My dear Ethel*,—I send you a doll, with my love, and wish you a happy birthday. Mamma says I can come and help you nurse it to-morrow. I have got on trousers now, and shall be a man soon. When I am a man I will come and see you lots of times. It is very hot to-day, and we have got some kittens,—I mean our pussy has. She sends her love. Ask your papa to let you come and see them.

Your loving Bonnie.

P.S.—You ought to see my trousers.

"How very like me it must have been!" he says, as his companion ends, "Please allow me to look at the wonderful epistle."

"Can I trust you?"

"Certainly, but you surely do not wish to keep it?"

How can she speak her mind, for, though he is altered since his childhood's day, yet she feels that she can love none other. Blushing she gives it him to read, and watches with wonder the shadow of sorrow that seems to pass over his face as he hands back the cherished note.

Then in silence he pulls for a little cove, where there is a private pathway and gate, and they disembark.

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Ethel Berrington was the only daughter of a wealthy merchant, and had known our hero from infancy. Boniface Douglas had lost his parents when he was about fifteen years of age, and ever since that



time had been under the care of an aunt, who, whilst she kept him well provided with the needful, petted him more than he liked ; for Bonnie, as we all called him, grew ashamed and tired of his aged relative's peculiar guardianship, and one day, in reply to one of her teasing interrogations, informed her that he would sooner work for his living than endure misery beneath her roof.

Startled at her nephew's unusual reply, Mrs. Douglas retired to think the matter over, and strange to say—we never guessed the reason at the time, but now it is revealed, as the reader shall see ere our story ends—sent Bonnie word that he might go and leave her, as she could not put up with “boys” at her house.

Of course we comforted him as best we could, but he laughed the matter off, and said he meant to live by literature and nothing else. Many an article on sports and pastimes, travels and adventures, had “B.D.” taken credit for in the *Rusleton Mercury*, and many a guinea had gone into his pocket thereby ; and so now he thought, if he could amuse a few country farmers' sons and daughters with his productions, he would certainly astonish the world by his careful survey of things in general, and his notes on men and things in particular. And in order to do this he resolved to go to London. “Why,” said I, when he came running into my private office to break the news, “why throw up all your prospects of honour and wealth, to seek an adventurous life in a profession of which you have hardly any experience?” “I can't help it,” he replied, “it's simply ridiculous, my dear fellow. Old Berrington still wants me to marry his daughter, and I don't care about telling him bluntly that I won't ; and out of friendship for the family I am obliged to visit them occasionally, when, as you know, they always manage to leave me alone with Ethel—only just now I have been invited to go up the river with them, and refused on the plea of not feeling well.”

“But I thought it was a settled thing about you and—”

“And Miss Berrington ? Yes, it was my father's wish, but, but—my dear boy, there are times when one can't accede to one's father's wishes even.”

“Then you find yourself unable to please the old lady, your aunt?”

“Yes, I must confess, I have been a little hasty, but what ordinary mortal is there who will bear the amount of worry, not intentional, I admit, which I have borne.”

“Poor fellow !” I ejaculated sarcastically.

“Well, really, my dear sir, cannot you see it ? Here am I with a tolerable share of brains and common sense, doing really nothing but hanging on an old relation, enduring her eccentricities, and spending her money. And then I have a timber merchant, through my late father, on the one hand, and a tallow factor, through my aunt, on the other, each seeking to obtain my person as a sacrifice to their daughters. Anyone would suppose me to be a very marriageable person, but you know the old adage about “Between two Stools?”

How I laughed at him to be sure, and advised him to stay, and make it up with his aunt ; reminded him of the extensive fortune he



would drop in for ; bid him not forget our private club ; and, finally, exhorted him, if he really left us, to take good care of himself.

And so Boniface Douglas was going to say farewell to Rusleton for a time ; but he promised he would often write to me, as indeed he did ; and when time knew him no more, I was enabled to gather together the facts I am about to relate, which formed the romance of his life.

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It was the morning of his departure. A glorious sun shone brightly in the morning sky, and caused our hero to tumble out of bed more quickly than usual. He could not have slept longer had he wished, for something seemed to urge him to go abroad and study the beauties of nature. Why should he wander in the meadows by the river side . . . his heart felt sick and weary . . . he almost wished he were not going . . . what object had he here . . . his eye brightens . . . what does he see? . . . A fair white-clad form meets him by the stile, and the touching manner in which both figures linger ere they say "adieu," makes us feel that there is *some* sentiment at the bottom of his heart. It is only a lover's parting. Let us smile and turn aside. Ah, youth ! with your vain fickle dreams of love, has not one great soul warned you, who wrote :—

All your aim is woman to win,  
This is the way that *boys* begin,  
Wait till you come to forty year !

This is the first time we see the fair white form. I cannot promise you it is the last.

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That evening Bonnie was walking gloomily along Oxford Street knowing none in the big city who would help him to reach the summit of his desires, and hardly caring where he went.

Let us leave him for a while, as memorials of the past rise before us through all the dull years of toil and expectations. Bonnie we called our boy, is he not our Bonnie still ? Times have changed, faces have altered, hearts have grown cold, and voices weakened ; still he lives as it were in a picture, and shining out of the mist of bye-gone times is that peaceful face, gentle and true, as it had well nigh always been.

Oh, London, with your hundreds and thousands of busy anxious mortals ! When shall the day dawn when your streets shall be even like unto the streets of a Fair New City wherein is nothing that worketh abomination or maketh a lie ?